

N.H. museum rooted in child's lesson

By Ellen Albanese

GLOBE STAFF

WARNER, N.H. — It all began with a visit from Chief Sachem Silverstar to an elementary school class in Pawtucket, R.I., in 1929. Among the pupils impressed by the Pequot chief's bearing, dress, and message was Charles "Bud" Thompson. When Bud found an arrowhead in his grandfather's cornfield that summer, his commitment to study and collect Native-American artifacts was sealed.

Detours

In 1991, Thompson and his wife, Nancy, opened the Mount Kearsarge Indian Museum on 10 acres in rural Warner to display their substantial collection. Thompson, 85, can often be seen tending to the grounds, where the staff is growing heritage corn, the type Native Americans grew, in which each kernel has a husk, along with traditional beans and squash.

"I can still remember how impressed I was with Silverstar's message that we are all connected to the earth, and we all have a purpose in life," Thompson said. So many modern environmental problems spring from the fact that we have lost that connection, Thompson said, noting that Native Americans "were the first and most devoted recyclers."

It was Nancy's idea to design the museum in a circle, Thompson said. That shape is sacred to Native Americans because it represents our interconnectedness. "It also makes for an interesting visit," he said, "because you can't see what's coming next."

Exhibits representing native tribes were arranged geographically beginning with the eastern woodlands, then moving to the plains and prairies, the Southwest, and the Pacific Northwest.

Displays of baskets and beadwork were especially impressive. Baskets made of birch bark were used to store food because birch bark has an antibacterial quality that helped keep it fresh. Ash baskets had beautiful ornamental details of shaved wood. Sweetgrass baskets from the Southeast featured decorative curlicues that looked like ribbon candy. Apache and Yavapai water baskets from the early 1900s were sealed with pitch.

Bandolier-style bags displayed intricate beadwork in floral and geometric designs. Fine hairs from under a moose's chin made delicate embroidery possible. Porcupine quill embroidery was vividly colored because the hollow shafts of the quills retain dyes well. Other exhibits included Navajo jewelry and Anasazi pottery from the Southwest, halibut hooks and wooden snow goggles from the Pacific North-

west, leather clothing and beaded cradle boards, ceremonial pipes, and musical instruments.

One area showed how the Plains Indians used every part of the buffalo. They turned the bladder and stomach into water vessels, used the brains to tan leather, ground the eyes to thicken paint, and burned the chips for fuel.

William Aronson, 12, of Portsmouth, N.H., visiting the museum with his family, was impressed with the buffalo exhibit. "The fact that they managed to find uses for every part of anything they killed is pretty amazing," he said. His brother Thomas, 7, was taken with the indoor tepee, which displays furnishings, cooking utensils, clothing, and decorative arts.

The museum's Medicine Woods Trail, on land reclaimed from a dump, is a self-guided walk that highlights more than 100 plants Native Americans used for food, medicine, dye, shelter, and tools: white pine for cough medicine, beech leaves for burns and wood for snowshoes, the fibrous inner bark of basswood for rope and fishnets.

The museum will end its public season Nov. 24 and 25 with free demonstrations of ash basket-making and Native-American music. In the winter and spring it will continue to welcome schoolchildren on field trips — some 6,000 a year.

"There lies the future," Thompson said. "Maybe some kid will come through who can take this further than I ever imagined."

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Mount Kearsarge Indian Museum

Kearsarge Mountain Road
Warner, N.H.

603-456-2600

indianmuseum.org

Weekends only in November, Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sunday noon-5. Adults \$8.50, seniors and students \$7.50, children ages 6-12 \$6.50, family rate \$26.

Directions: Warner is 84 miles or about 1½ hours from Boston. Take Interstate 93 north to I-89 north. Take exit 8, Route 103, to the center of Warner, and turn right on Kearsarge Mountain Road. The museum is one mile on the right.





PHOTOS BY ELLEN ALBANESE/GLOBE STAFF

Mount Kearsarge Indian Museum in Warner, N.H., schedules activities in its tepee. The exhibits inside describe various aspects of Native-American life from canoe making to handicrafts.

